

Week 5 Report

What Other Groups Did & Group Dynamics

As we successfully concluded the 5th week of the program, we are pleased to report that we saw great improvement in free-flowing discussions and positive dynamics in most groups, and that your students are having meaningful discussions. The majority of groups engaged in rich and fruitful conversations where they expressed their thoughts and opinions openly and respectfully. Students are asking good questions and are coming up with constructive thoughts and reflections that are prompting deeper discussions. As students are taking greater ownership of the discussion and pushing the dialogue forward, we are seeing a greater diversity of discussion topics, and facilitators are reporting good and excellent group dynamics. Facilitators are also reporting that students are naturally identifying the group space as one in which they can approach sensitive topics and ask questions of the 'other' that they would not in other settings. This week and next, students are also conducting community interviews, and some have begun sharing the outcomes with their group members.

The majority of groups did the "Life Stories" activity this week, in which they discussed the main influences / moments that have shaped their perspective in general, and their interactions with people from other cultures, in specific. For these groups, this activity helped students get to know each other better, and allowed them to explore the lens with which each student views the world. Conversations flowed smoothly and students went on to explore topics that came out of the stories shared, and they explored themes such as the origins and causes of commonly-held stereotypes and cultural misunderstandings, how they encounter gender, global and social inequality in their daily lives, and how they identify the role of religion in their lives and in society.

Attendance & Technology Update

Attendance levels have slightly improved this week, and the majority of groups had the critical mass necessary for students to be able to engage in constructive dialogue and interesting discussions. We're hopeful that those who were absent this week will attend their sessions next week and through the remainder of the semester to fully benefit from the experience. Their attendance is crucial for their groups' dynamics and learning process, and we would be grateful if you could **please remind your students that their attendance and participation remain crucial to the group's dynamic and to making the most out of their Soliya experience.** We are also happy to report that we continue to address the technical issues that arose during sessions, and fewer students are experiencing technical difficulties.

This Week

Next week, students will discuss their final project peer engagement interviews. They will also discuss one or two topics that their groups selected and identified as important global challenges and they'll have the opportunity to dig into them in greater depth, compare and contrast the different ways they perceive these issues, and the ways in which their personal perspectives / bias enrich and drive the dialogue. We hope students will continue to reflect on their own perspectives to gain greater awareness of the assumptions and values underlying their views, discuss the best ways to understand and engage with perspectives different from their own, and think critically about how they address differences and conflict.